

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BRUSSE 02325 191727Z

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00

NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20 USIA-15 AID-20

EB-11 FRB-02 XMB-07 OPIC-12 CIEP-02 LAB-06 SIL-01

OMB-01 MC-02 ACDA-19 DRC-01 /184 W

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FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 527

USDOC WASHDC

SECTREASURY WASHDC

SECDEF WASHDC

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY OSLO

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRUSSELS 2325

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, NATO, BE, OVIP (DENT, FREDERICK B.)

SUBJECT: SECRETARY DENT'S CONVERSATIONS: REPLACEMENT FOR

F-104

REF: (A) STATE 38015; (B) BRUSSELS 2039

1. SUMMARY: DURING APRIL 17 CALL ON BELGIAN MINISTER FOR ECONOMIC AFFAIRS WILLY CLAES, SECRETARY OF COMMERCE DENT, ACCOMPANIED BY AMBASSADOR STRAUSZ-HUPE, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF COMMERCE FOX, AND COMMERCIAL ATTACHE GRANT, MADE STRONG REPRESENTATIONS FOR BELGIAN PURCHASE OF AN AMERICAN PRODUCT FOR REPLACEMENT OF F-104. FOLLOWING IS UNCLEARED MEMCON. END SUMMARY.

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PAGE 02 BRUSSE 02325 191727Z

2. DRAWING ON ARGUMENTS MADE IN THE AMBASSADOR'S LETTER

TO MINISTER VANDEN BOEYNANTS (REF A) SECRETARY DENT STATED THAT BELGIAN DECISION ON REPLACEMENT FOR F-104 WOULD BE OF GREAT IMPORTANCE TO NATO ALLIANCE. HE POINTED TO THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING COMMON EQUIPMENT AMONG NATO FORCES, AND THE EFFECT THIS WOULD HAVE ON NATO'S ABILITY TO MAINTAIN COMMON STOCKS AND SUPPLIES, BACK-UP CAPABILITY, AND TRAINING. THE SECRETARY CITED THE TECHNICAL QUALITY OF U.S. CONTENDERS, AND THE PROVEN U.S. ABILITY TO PROVIDE RELIABLE LOGISTIC SUPPORT. HE SAID THE DECISION BY THE GOB WAS VIEWED WITH CONCERN AT THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF THE U.S. GOVERNMENT, AND WE DO NOT WISH TO MISS THE CHANCE TO RECEIVE FULL CONSIDERATION FOR THE MERITS OF A U.S. AIRCRAFT. HE FURTHER CITED THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SELLERS OF SUCH KEY ITEMS IN THE NATO INVENTORY BEING PARTICIPANTS IN THE ALLIANCE. HE STATED THAT ALL U.S. ADMINISTRATIONS HAD STRONGLY SUPPORTED THE COMMITMENT TO NATO, AND THAT THIS WAS THE KIND OF SUPPORT REQUIRED FOR ALLIANCE SOLIDARITY. THE SECRETARY REMARKED THAT THE POLITICAL UNCERTAINTY IN FRANCE CONSEQUENT TO PRESIDENT POMPIDOU'S DEATH RAISED A QUESTION AS TO THE FUTURE COURSE OF FRENCH POLICIES AND TO WHAT ONE MIGHT EXPECT IN TERMS OF MILITARY SUPPORT.

3. AMBASSADOR STRAUSZ-HUPE NOTED THAT DECLARATIONS ON ALLIANCE PRINCIPLES WERE MOST WELCOME AND IMPORTANT, BUT WERE STILL WORDS WHILE A POSITIVE ACT, LIKE THE PURCHASE OF THE F-104 REPLACEMENT, WOULD BE A CONCRETE DEMONSTRATION OF COMMITMENT. HE MADE THE POINT THAT WHATEVER THE COMPOSITION OF THE FUTURE FRENCH GOVERNMENT, THE MIRAGE SUPER F-1 WOULD NOT BE BY ORIGIN A NATO AIRCRAFT. MR. FOX underscored that given current difficulties in the U.S. aerospace industry, a contract for the F-104 replacement would provide additional security for the long-term defense production capacity of the U.S. He added that in terms of burdensharing, a Belgian purchase of an American plane would have a highly beneficial effect on U.S. critics. A purchase of the Mirage Super F-1, on the other hand, would provide France with a free ride of commercial sales without any commitment to

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PAGE 03 BRUSSE 02325 191727Z

DEFENSE EXPENDITURES.

4. MINISTER CLAES RESPONDED THAT WITH THE PRESENT CARE-TAKER GOVERNMENT, BELGIUM COULD NOT MAKE A DECISION OF THE MAGNITUDE OF THE F104 REPLACEMENT. FACED WITH A CHOICE AMONG FIVE OR MORE CONTENDERS, THE MOST THAT THEY HAD BEEN ABLE TO DO WAS TO NARROW THE CHOICE TO THE MIRAGE SUPER F-1 AND THE NORTHROP COBRA. HE SAID THAT, AS HE HAD EARLIER TOLD THE AMERICAN AMBASSADOR, AND AS HE HAD DEMONSTRATED BY HIS STAND ON THE PURCHASE OF BOEING 737'S, HIS OWN

POSITION WOULD BE DECIDED BY FULL CONSIDERATION OF THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL FACTORS INVOLVED. WITH REGARD TO THE EFFECTS OF THE FRENCH POLITICAL SITUATION, HE SAID THERE WAS A REAL POSSIBILITY OF MITTERAND GOVERNMENT WITH COMMUNIST PARTICIPATION AND THAT IN MAKING A DECISION SUCH AS F-104 REPLACEMENT IT WAS IMPORTANT TO KNOW THE DIRECTION OF THE NEW FRENCH GOVERNMENT.

5. COMMENT: MINISTER CLAES ESSENTIALLY RESTATED THE POSITION WHICH HE HAD PREVIOUSLY GIVEN AMBASSADOR STRAUSZ-HUPE, REPORTED REF B., I.E., THAT NO FINAL DECISION HAD BEEN TAKEN ON THE F-104 REPLACEMENT NOR COULD BE TAKEN BY CURRENT CARETAKER GOVERNMENT BUT THAT THE CHOICE HAD BEEN NARROWED TO THE MIRAGE SUPER F-1 AND COBRA. KNOWLEDGEABLE AND FORCEFUL PRESENTATION OF U.S. ARGUMENTS BY CABINET MEMBER OBVIOUSLY MADE STRONG IMPRESSION ON CLAES. THE EMBASSY FULLY CONCURS WITH SECRETARY DENT'S SUGGESTION THAT A SIMILAR HIGH-LEVEL APPROACH BE MADE WHEN NEW BELGIAN GOVERNMENT IS FORMED. STRAUSZ-HUPE

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